

# SURVIVING DROUGHT, WAR, & LOSS: STORIES & TALES FROM ROSE VOLK

*I am currently working on my grandmother's memoirs about growing up on a farmstead on the plains of North Dakota. To get all of the information straight, it made sense to compile a few of our interviews into one comprehensive document. There are many more stories my grandmother has shared with me, but for now, I wanted to preface her memoirs with the following interviews about farming, resilience, and hard work.*

*A family tree is located at the end of the interviews.*

## **Early Life:**

**Rose:** I have so many stories. Do you want to start with how I grew up? When I was a little girl, if I remember? I remember best when I started going to school. We lived almost two miles, a mile and three quarters, from school. Whenever it was possible, dad took us, and if not, we had to walk to school. So when the days were rough in the winter time (We had some rough winters too.), he took us with a sled pulled by the horses.

**Grace:** What age did you start school?

**Rose:** I was seven years old.

**G:** Was it a one-room schoolhouse?

**R:** Yes, there were all eight grades, or the schoolhouse went up to eight' grade. It was heated too – sometimes. It was so darn cold, but it was heated with coal, and the neighbors usually started the furnace before the teacher came in. A lot of times, the teachers boarded with that same neighbor group. But it seemed like when you got to the school it was still so damn cold all day. (She laughs.) The drafts chilled your feet, and they would never be warm. Oh my God it was just... I had cold feet all my life and now they're so hot. They burn in the night. I have spells like that. It's terrible. What to do?\*

\*Please note: Rose's first language was German. As a result, this interview occasionally contains broken speech patterns; e.g., "What to do?" instead of "What is there to do?" Additionally, the "th" sound becomes a hard t.

**G:** What is the name of the area you grew up in?

**R:** It was called the Grassna District. I have some books on it too. Now, let me see.

Where would I have put them? Let me see if I can pick some of my books out. (Her voice drifts out as she looks for her books in the next room.) We had many teachers. Let me tell you, one teacher was terrible, but he was fired and then he didn't serve all year round.

*(When she returns, she opens a scrapbook to a page with school children. A small school house is in the background.)* See, I have where I went to school here. This is the school house we had. There's not much of a write up in here though. There's where the Church was and our school was right here.

**R:** No, no. I put perms in. I thought I put more in here. It must be in a different book. There's nothing in here. Nothing that we want to talk about today.

**G:** Did you have straight, brown hair then?

**R:** Straight brown hair is right. I had it long. I was even old when I had braids yet. I still have braids in here. This is a class photo. Those are the kids at school. I remember them yet, but there's not too many left.

*(She points to herself in the back row with braids.)*



I went to that school, and I graduated after eight' grade. We had a teacher who stayed at our house. I had her for two years as a teacher. When we got home from school, we always had to carry out coal and water and all of that. There was no running water. Those were our chores 'til dark. (She laughs.) It would take 'til dark to finish them.

**G:** Did you guys use the coal to heat the house?

**R:** Oh yes. Coal to heat the house and water to drink and wash. In the winters, we had to carry coal and ashes from the pot in the evening and the morning. We had to always make sure we had enough during the night. We had a well too, not far away from the house.

**G:** What year were you born?

**R:** I was born on August 19th, 1929. I had three older siblings and three younger ones after me.

**G:** Did you like growing up on a farm?

**R:** I did like it. I was actually born on the farm, at home, in the sod house. Dad went to town to get the doctor and then the doctor came out. In those days the doctors came to the house. Mhm. Dr. Williams delivered me. I still remember his name. We mostly had midwives back then, but my dad always called the doctor. Albert's ma, she had hers all by a midwife.

**G:** What was your dad like?

**R:** My dad was very gentle to us all, and he was always good to us. Ma was too, but she was... When we made mistakes, she got a little more angry than dad. But I can't remember dad ever getting upset at us like mom did. He always kind of excused us. He would try to relay to us not to make the same mistakes again. But I mean, he never seemed to punish us, no.

**G:** And he was a farmer, right?

**R:** Oh yeah. My dad was a farmer all his life. He farmed with his dad. He was raised in the United States though. His parents, my grandparents, came over [from Russia] but he was raised in the United States. My dad had nine sisters and one brother. Isn't that something? My dad and his siblings got along all the time too which was good.

**G:** Wow, I can't believe all of his siblings got along.

**R:** It was amazing. I was raised on our farm and then I stayed home a long time because I got sick. We built a new house, and then running water and electricity came in 1949.\* We lived in the sod house until the fall when we moved to the new home with electricity. It was a whole different world then, with the war and the other stuff we had to live with.

*\*Please note: Rose was twenty years old when she and her family moved into a modern house.*

**G:** What was the sod house like? I feel like a lot of people don't know what a sod house is.

**R:** A sod house was traditionally built out of mud and straw and clay. They tried to get dirt that had clay in it so things would stick together. Sod houses were originally all only three rooms. They had a front room, they called it, where they had their bedroom. Then they had a kitchen and the other one was for their children.

Our house didn't look like a sod house on the outside though. Grandpa, my dad's dad, was amazing. He had redone it. Grandpa framed it and put siding over it. He added extra bedrooms in the back. In the front, he built on an entrance and a porch. It looked like it was not a sod house on the outside but inside you could tell. Then grandpa, I can't remember what year, added all those renovations before my parents got married in 1922.

**G:** When your parents built your new house, did you demolish the sod house and build over it?

**R:** We demolished it after building our new home. We built our new house a little ways over. It was sitting until one summer then dad... I don't know what kind of machinery he used. I can't remember, but I know he demolished it by chopping it all up. We had such a low place down by the barn, by the pigs, and he filled that in there; that is, whatever they used for the sod.

**G:** I remember your dad's parents were from Russia. What about your mom, Mary?

**R:** She was raised here, just like my dad was raised in the United States. Both of my grandparents were from the same area in Russia. When they moved to town, the grandparents lived kitty-corner from each other

They each built a big home in town. Unbelievable. I don't know where they got the money from, but they must have had a little money.

**G:** By town, I am sure you mean Strasburg. How far away was your farm from the town of Strasburg when you were growing up?

**R:** 9 and 3/4th miles. Almost 10 miles, to say. We went into town only once a week with my dad. Otherwise, we didn't go into town.

**G:** You mentioned you were the middle child. Did you have six siblings in total?

**R:** Yes, I had six sisters and one brother. Magnus, my dad, had six sisters and six daughters. That was twelve. He was always surrounded by girls. (She laughs.)

Either Dad or the doctor recorded when I was born. I didn't have a name right away when I was born. My baptism certificate showed my name was spelled "Rosabelle." I only got my birth certificate when I was ready to file for my social security many years later; although, I was supposed to already have my birth certificate. Since I couldn't find one, I went up to the capitol in Bismarck. They had a birth certificate, but they didn't have a name on there.

**G:** You didn't have a name on your birth certificate?!

**R:** No, I have a picture of it and everything. They didn't have a name written down on it. I then told my friend that I can pick the name I like, how it's spelled, and everything. She said no, I should go home and go to the courthouse to see how my name was spelled when I went to school. Well, we had a sort of principal or teacher. When I told him my name was Rosabelle, he made up a new name because he spelled it differently. He spelled it like 'Rose-Bella;' R-O-S-E and then Bella in the back. He had the (e) and the (a) turned around. When I got my certificate, the name written was Rosebella, not Rosabelle. I had to take that name. That's the name I have now.

**G:** You had to accept that name even though there was no name written down on your birth certificate?

**R:** Yep. I even went and looked up my baptism certificate. It said "Rosabelle" on that one. That's the way I wanted my name to be. But they said I

needed to go to the courthouse and use the name that was written down when I went to first grade. That was so stupid.

**G:** That's too bad. I can imagine your parents must have wanted the name listed on your baptism certificate.

**R:** I think they wanted the name that was on the baptism certificate. Well, my parents had our aunts take us to the church for our baptism. My ma wanted me to be named Veronica in the first place 'cause that would have been my grandma's name. Then Aunt Rose, my dad's sister, my godmother, said that was such an old name, my grandma's name. She told the priest to baptize me Rosabelle. They brought me home and told my parents I was baptized Rosabelle.

**G:** Oh your poor mom...

**R:** This happened to my sister Valeria too. I don't remember who her godmother was, but Valeria was supposed to be named Veronica too, like Grandma Wagner. They brought her home, and they named her Valeria. Our aunts wanted the newer names. I remember my godmother was very good though. She came out to the farm every year I had a birthday. She brought me a birthday cake.

**G:** They named you guys different names, even against your parents wishes?

**R:** Yeah, they wouldn't even ask. Dad was along for the baptism. I guess Dad didn't care.

**G:** Since there were mostly girls in your family, would you have to farm? Would you have to go out and help your dad?

**R:** Mhm. See, I had another brother, but he died when he was born. So many babies died when they had the cord around their necks. They were blue and then they did not labor through. That's what happened to my brother. His name was Daniel. I named my son after him. They called my brother Dannie too. I remember when I named Daniel. My mom said, "Finally, somebody named their boy Daniel." She was glad to hear that, but I really thought about it.

**G:** Was your brother Daniel born before your brother Magnus Jr?

**R:** No, he was the last one. He was the youngest.

My parents had six girls in a row and then they had two boys, just like their parents. My dad's parents had nine girls and two boys, but dad was the third oldest and John was younger.

**G:** Was that hard for your family to lose him so young?

**R:** My mother really missed him, yeah. My dad was sad too. When they're born like that, they could have been saved but... he wasn't.

(A resident knocks on the door. Rose gets up to go over to the hallway. "Yeah?" "You going to bowl Rose?" an older man's voice asks from the doorway. "No, I got company." "Oh you got company, okay." "I have company, ya." Mumbles. "Huh?" "That's alright, well maybe tomorrow." "Yeah, we'll see ya.. If I'm here!" She laughs and rejoins our table.)

I was busy all week already. I told him I wasn't going to be bowling, that I had company but...

**G:** They're going to miss their star player.

**R:** Yeah, yeah, yeah. He's been beating me in bowling. He's been practicing. That's why he's so anxious to beat me now. He's so proud. Sometimes I give him a rough time though. Boy we get almost to the end, to the last frame, and I goof up. So silly.

**G:** Wii bowling sounds competitive.

**R:** Yeah, I guess it is!

### **World War II and The Dirty Thirties**

**G:** Okay, let's get some dates on the table. You were born in 1929, but do you remember any of the '30s?

**R:** Oh yes, I really remember the '30s. The end, anyway. Let me see, I was born in '29, and the '30s came. I was about six or seven years old in the 1930s, but I remember. Oh my God, was that a dust storm. And t'istles, t'istles, t'istles. I remember the grasshoppers, a lot of grasshoppers some years, and the t'istles flying around, and the dust storms. It was sometimes terrible.

**G:** How often would the dust storms occur?

**R:** Oh, you know North Dakota's so windy. It was especially in the summertimes. Oh my God, there was one a week for darn sure, a good one every week when the wind was blowing strong.

**G:** How did your family manage to get through that if your dad was a farmer?

**R:** Well, I don't know. My dad made it somehow. We had a cow that we could handle. How he fed it? I don't know, but he kept it alive. Then we always had milk and stuff. Sometimes, they gave out stuff in town that you could pick up, like a box of apples or sugar or something like that. But those dry years, I remember them very, very, very good – I mean, the three or five years I was old enough to remember them.

When I was about thirteen or fourteen years old, it started getting a little better. We tried to get the t'istles together and burn 'em. Dad raked the t'istles into piles, in rows. Then Viola and I had to carry fire to burn them, but we had to wait til the right day when the wind came in the right direction so that it took our rows. You wouldn't believe it. They burned so fast. Just whoosh! We burned the rows, and then he had a big plowed field in the next area over. He plowed that field so the fire wouldn't spread. Oh my God. It would have burned down the whole country. A lot of people did that, and then there was so much soil that blew away. Dad ended up taking the fences away because the soil had blown all underneath the fence so that the dirt was built up to the first line of wire. There were always two rows of wires, you know. He took it away and tried to get that topsoil back to the field. We'd scoop, horses, and scoop.

**G:** That sounds like a lot of work.

**R:** It was, but we tried to get one field after another straightened out. We did a lot of fencing then too. Grasshoppers, they even ate a fencepost down to the first wire. I even saw it all chewed up. It was unbelievable.

**G:** Did your dad ever have a harvest during those dry years?

**R:** Well, we'd harvest whatever we could when we'd have a little rain or showers. He'd try to get a little of anything for the cows, and then we slowly got more cows and more stuff. Slowly we improved from one year to another. By 1942, I will never forget that year, we had a beautiful crop. I remember in the summertime, my grandpas came

out and helped harvest, and my uncle, Matt. He had the bar in town so he could get away. We had another worker who helped. Of course my dad, Viola, my mom, we all helped carry the wheat to the header box. Then we had a little of a crop.

Then my youngest brother, Magnus, and myself, came down with scarlet fever and we were quarantined in the house that year. No one could come and see us except my sister Marty because she had it already. Actually, both Marty and Arlene had it before and we didn't even know it. Since they were immune, they could come in and bring us food, water, and everything while we were quarantined. Yep, that was such a happy day in one way, but Magnus was very sick. When you have scarlet fever you have such a high fever, and then the doctor came out and said it was so contagious. Nobody could go in. Magnus and I were lying in bed. I remember he was in a crib. He was that small. I think he was only two years old. That's why I remember it so good.

**G:** Oh he was so little.

**R:** Yeah, and I was about nine then or something like that. Those were some days. They were rough days. Those years you always have high in your mind all the time.

**G:** So, um, that's interesting. Your dad never served in World War I?

**R:** My dad? Hu-uh. But the war was going on. That's another thing that I lived through. I remember everything was rationed: gas and groceries like sugar. A lot of things you couldn't get during wars. You had to have a certain ticket. Sometimes they had only so much gas and so much food you could buy. They gave you only a little bit. We were given stamps (the tickets) that acted just like money so you'd be helped along.

**G:** And a lot of young boys probably got drafted in World War II?

**R:** Oh my God. Around 1942 I was old enough to learn how to play the organ, so Father Selder taught me. I remember how many funerals I played for the service guys. Some of the men's bodies didn't even come home, but we had a coffin there anyway. They were killed in Europe, and they couldn't find their bodies, but we still had their funerals.



**A 1946 Portrait of Rose's Family.**

**Top row: Rita, Viola**

**Middle row: Valeria, Rose, Marcella (Marty)**

**Bottom row: Arlene, Magnus, Mary, Magnus Jr.**

Those years were sad. I remember a lot of boys that died, that were killed. They were all more so around Valeria's age, but I knew the parents and the families.

**G:** How old would Valeria, your older sister, have been?

**R:** Oh Valeria was about 19 or 20 during that time. The war happened around 1942-1945. All of her friends had to leave for the service. But Leo was the only brother or son in their family, so he didn't get drafted into service. They ended up getting married.

**G:** So if a family only had one son, the parents didn't have to send him to serve in the war? That boy wouldn't be drafted?

**R:** Hm-mh, in this case it was because they lived on a farm. Sometimes the government would exempt the only son so that one boy could stay home to help with crops. Not all boys who were the "only son" in their family would stay home at that time. They could still get drafted.

**G:** Okay, I see. It depended on if the family farmed and if they had enough help.

**R:** Yeah, but Albert, my God, there were seven of his brothers including himself in the service. There were nine boys in total. They had them all over the world.

**G:** Did they all serve in World War II?

**R:** Only one of his brothers, Ray, served in World War II. He was the second oldest and served at the tail end of the war. The other ones were in Vietnam and the Korean War. They were younger, you know. Victor, the oldest brother, didn't pass his physical so he didn't have to go overseas. I don't know why he didn't pass. Then Albert served in the Korean War. Then some of them served in the Vietnam War. Mhm.

**G:** Did Albert and all of his brothers make it back safely?

**R:** No, one of them got sick in the Philippines. That was Gilbert. He was in the Navy. He got Malaria, and he died. Gilbert was younger than Albert was. They had a bunch of boys, Albert's parents. Yeah, poor grandma. They did have one girl, Florence.

**G:** Where did Albert and his brothers get stationed?

**R:** They were overseas. Where was Ray? Ray was some place too during the end of World War II. I think Martin was stationed in France. Gilbert was overseas in Korea. Albert was in Germany, but by then the wars were over with. They sent him to Germany to watch the border there. They've taken it down now, I guess. They had guarded that yet in those years though.

**G:** Why did Albert go to Germany over Korea?

**R:** Well, his orders sent him over there after he was done with training in Kentucky. He spoke German, and that could have been a factor.

**G:** Well, that was lucky.

**R:** It was lucky. He had a pretty good place. I read about a lot of them that have recently died in the papers, those who would be around his age about now, and they were in Germany too. A lot of the ladies, their husbands too, were once stationed in Germany like Albert.

**G:** It's so interesting to me that your guys' family trees are inverted. Albert's family had nine boys and one girl, while your family had six girls and two boys in it.

**R:** Albert's family had two children, a boy and a girl, die in childbirth too. They technically had 12 children in total. They died the same way as our little boy

Daniel did, mhm. Albert's mom was such a saint. Poor girl. Nowadays it wouldn't go over, but in those years, they didn't have the decency. She got pregnant when she was 14 years old, and she got married when she was 15.

**G:** She got pregnant before getting married?

**R:** Yeah, oh yeah. The baby was big already. They got married on the 10th of August, and on the 18th of August, Victor was born. It was unbelievable.

**G:** That must have been pretty scandalous at that time. Was that common?

**R:** It was pretty common. But then a lot of them didn't keep their babies, they gave their babies up because the men didn't marry them.

**G:** Why didn't the men marry them?

**R:** I don't know. They just wanted to use them, didn't like them that much I guess.

**G:** That's terrible.

**R:** It's terrible, but that's the way the world is I guess. Those men don't care. It's not fair, but it's the way they were made. Gotta have common sense or whatever you call it.

**G:** Women should have common sense?

**R:** No, the men, and whoever has to use their common sense. I don't know. It was almost better not to marry those men. A lot of the women married them, and then they just abused them anyway. They weren't nice to them at all, and they made them work. I don't know why. But a lot of years ago men abused their women, and made them work like crazy.

**G:** So what made your family different? You said your father, Magnus, was very kind and gentle. You say a lot of men were abusers.

**R:** Well, my dad wasn't a drinker neither. It was the alcohol. A lot of them were alcoholics. They made their own booze. Chokecherry wine and red eyes made with sugar and Everclear. Why were they drinkers? I don't know, but there were a lot of drinkers. Mhm. There were a lot of them that were, even around our place. Boy we were lucky that our

dad wasn't.

**G:** Did your dad ever say why he didn't drink?

**R:** Well, he didn't think it was...you know. He didn't like it. He had drinks, but he wouldn't get drunk. He didn't want them to make a fool out of him. When he saw the other ones, they walked around with wet pants, and they were lying underneath the trees vomiting. When they were drinkers, they were drinkers. They would drink until they fell over and didn't know about something for days. They just didn't quit.

**G:** But Albert's father was a drinker?

**R:** Mhm. It's so funny now. Not a one of his boys did drink. Albert was once very bad. He was young, and he started so early. He overdid it, and he was sick. Then they had to take him to the doctor. The doctor told them, "Next time he's not going to live." He just like that quit drinking. That's what made him stop.

**G:** But his brothers didn't drink?

**R:** Not that I noticed, not while I was among them. They never got drunk, not a one of the brothers that I could see. But the old man did. I saw him a lot of the times pass out or come home and bitch and almost clean out the house. Grandma had to be careful when he came home. Sometimes he was pretty mean, but she could handle it. As young as she was, she could handle so many things. I don't know where she got her courage, but she really was smart. In so many ways, she was so smart as young as she was. She really could make a meal out of nothing. She was unbelievable.

Albert and I lived on the home farm for a while when we first got married. Years ago, the number one thing to do to was to go home and live on the family farm. So we served a lot of people like Magnus Jr., my sisters and his brothers sometimes on Sundays. It was common we had them out there because they wanted to come out to farm and visit.

Well, Grandpa Volk was always drinking in the bars every Saturday night, but the bars were closed back then on Sunday nights, thank God. He always invited all the drunks out to mom on Sundays. Here the people came, and she didn't do any extra shopping. Well, she never had that much money neither. She had to make meals for them all the time. Then they were sitting and drinking at home

because the bars were closed. Yeah, I remember a lot of Sundays where she had to go through that. She had a bunch of kids then too. Ei, ei, ei. That's the way Grandpa Volk was.

**G:** Was she more of a quiet person? Did she ever speak up?

**R:** No no. She was such a quiet woman. How she could take everything? I don't know. She never spoke out. Hm.

**G:** Why do you think she never spoke out?

**R:** I don't know. She didn't know where to start I guess. There would have been no end. It probably wouldn't have helped neither. She just had the idea that women took it all, and just went along, and whatever happened, happened. She took it all for years and years, as long as we were married. It was amazing. She was a special woman to me. I thought to myself I was really lucky to know her.

She had Roger, the baby for a while, only in her early thirties. She started having kids so young. She didn't get pregnant for ten or twelve years afterwards. What did she do? I don't know, but she must have found something out. Anyway, she didn't get pregnant, but then all at once she got pregnant again. She was only 42 then when Rodney, the youngest, came along. Again, I don't know how she got that spell in the middle there when she didn't have kids. She could have had 15 kids like a lot of them did, as young as she was when she got married.

**G:** Do you think it was intentional that she didn't have any kids for that span of ten or twelve years?

**R:** No, she wasn't any different that I had noticed. We all just thought she didn't have her menstruation anymore. Somehow, she must have started menstruating again.

### **Marriage, Sickness, & Family Life**

**G:** When did you meet Albert?

**R:** We met at an Easter dance. They'd always have dances after Lent, around Easter Monday. We were around 15 or 16 when we met. He's only a couple of months older than I am. He was born in April and then in August I was born that same year. His mom had her babies close together.

**G:** Was his family farm close to your guys' farm?

**R:** Well, it wasn't so close... almost seven to ten miles apart.

**G:** Did you both kind of grow up together?

**R:** Well, not really. His family went to a different church, and we went to a different church. We both went to different schools, so we weren't that close together. We did get to know each other through church though. I went with Father Selder a lot of times to their parish, Saint Bernhardt's, to play the organ and to do other things for religion too.

I would see a lot of my friends at wedding dances. Albert and I talked a lot at dances. Once and a while he came and picked me up for a dance, which was really dumb. You never knew when they were coming because there was no phone or nothing. A lot of times, they showed up and I had to get ready for it. Then I got sick. I didn't go to a dance for years.

**G:** Would he come visit you when you were sick?

**R:** Not all the time. Hm-mh. I didn't want him.

**G:** Why didn't you want him?

**R:** I was always surprised he came back. I never

*Albert during his years in the service.*



thought he'd come back because it took a long time til I got well again. He always showed up though for years and years.

**G:** How old were you when you got sick with rheumatic fever?

**R:** I thought I was 16, but the other day I figured out I graduated in '45, and I was 16 years old. That winter I got sick after Christmas in February. So I was 17 when I got sick.

**G:** So you got sick in February of 1946?

**R:** That would have been '46, mhm. I was really sick for at least a year. I didn't go no place when the doctor told me I'll never live. Marty, my older sister, was the one that took care of me a lot because she hadn't left the house yet, and she was around my age. The doctor told me I should go home and go to bed, just don't do nothing. I got so sick at home and then Father Selder came. My dad asked him to come and give me the last rights because that doctor always kept saying people like myself will never make it.

So he gave me the last rights. Father Selder said to Dad, "You have to take her some place further because she will never make it." So we made an appointment in Bismarck, and my dad took me up to the Bismarck hospital. The doctors were so upset with him because he didn't bring me earlier. Well, the country doctor always told my dad it wouldn't help for me to get further care, so he didn't know any better. When my dad brought me up there, they put me in the hospital and gave me the penicillin shots, oh my God, every four hours, day and night. I was in the hospital for a whole month. Then, they said I could go home, but when I put my feet over the bed to get dressed, oh my God. It felt like a bunch of needles went through my legs. They hurt so bad, and I knew I couldn't stand on them. They had to wheel me out to the car in a wheelchair.

**G:** Why did they give you penicillin shots?

**R:** Well, to get my heart strong again. You see, it ruined my heart valves. They also had to stop the infection or fever or whatever it was. That [penicillin] was one thing that would have helped if they got it early enough, if I would have went right away. Although, I think I was home for about a month or two 'til I got so very sick. It just didn't get better.

Anyway, I came home. They told me I had to stay in

bed another three months or so. Well, you know what I would have been. I would have been disappearing just lying in bed. I would have lost everything. My heart would have gotten worse too. Dad carried me into the house when I first got home. We got the bed ready and well, I had to stay in bed. So that's what we were going to do. But Marty and I, we decided we're not gonna to do that. Marty and I were pretty close. (She laughs.) We didn't tell Mom and Dad, or they would have probably told us you better stay in bed because it's the doctor's orders.

Every day I had to go to the bathroom. Instead of using the bedpan, I tried to get on my legs a little bit at a time so I could go to the pot instead. Those bedpans are so unhandy, and I didn't have a bed that could lift up. I almost had to sit in order to go to the bathroom because I couldn't even pee with it lying down. We did that, then Marty and I slowly worked myself up to taking my legs off the bed, and the first week or so I was pretty good in bed.

After that, we tried something else. We slowly got me to where I could walk, and get up on my legs. Then we walked a little bit around the house, and all at once I decided to walk to the barn where they were milking. I walked out to the barn, but boy when I was out there, I thought that's the end... I didn't say anything. I sat in the separate shed, waited, watched them separate and everything. Then, I tried to walk back to the house again. I think that walking and moving around kept my heart, my muscles strong and in the end, I was staying alive. Dad always had to take me up to the hospital to get checkups. The doctors always said they couldn't believe I was alive yet. It was just amazing to them.

**G:** Well that seems kind of rude.

**R:** Well, then my doctor left... He, I don't know, he retired of course. They all retired on me. After I had different doctors, and pretty soon I had a heart specialist. When the heart specialist saw me, he said if I live another 30 years then they would do heart surgery. 30 years. In 33 years I then had my first heart surgery. But, oh, was I sick. The heart doctor that then came to Bismarck didn't do surgery, but she checked out my heart. She said that my heart was now double the size of what it really was, and if I didn't have surgery within a month, I'd die.

Well, I was home for about a week. She said she was going to set the surgery up in Fargo so we waited. I was waiting and waiting for her to call me and tell me when to go over there. Finally, I had to

I had to call. She said, "You aren't over there? I'll make sure you're over there." She made an appointment for me. Albert took me over there for my surgery. We parked in a ramp across the street from the hospital, and I walked across the street. They couldn't believe that I made it across. I walked! And they had a wheelchair there by the door already. They put me in the wheelchair, and that was it. They wheeled me up to bed and got me ready. It took another week though 'til they had me really ready for surgery. I got my first pig valve in 1978 on November 13t'..

**G:** When you were really sick as a young girl, did you get depressed? Were you sad you were missing out on so much? I can imagine that would wear on a person.

**R:** Well, some days were not so good, but nobody made me do anything or said anything... They were all good to me, whoever was around. They'd try to help me along, tell me that it was okay. It seemed like that's what made me survive. What else was there to do? But I also had all these kids before I got that valve.

**G:** That's true. I don't think a lot of people would have that many kids in your condition like you did.

**R:** Yeah, that doctor said my muscles on the outside of my heart got better, got stronger. He told me I'll probably be able to have two or three kids. Well, I had two I guess or three. Then they told me I needed a hysterectomy. Saint Alexis, the Catholic hospital in Bismarck, would not have given me a hysterectomy because my uterus was healthy. I had to go to the other hospital, MedCenter, a few blocks over.

I didn't say anything. I thought, "I don't even want to go over there because all the people will know I had that hysterectomy." They'd think, "Why's she going to church?" At that time, you weren't supposed to have that done. I ended up walking over to MedCenter anyway. I got to the parking lot, but I didn't go inside. I turned around. I thought, "I'm not doing that." I didn't even tell Albert or nothing. I just went home and decided whatever happens, happens.

**G:** But your doctor said that you shouldn't have more kids. Wouldn't the Church have been alright with you getting a hysterectomy because of that?

**R:** My uterus was healthy. If I would have had

cancer or a tumor or something on my uterus, then it would have been okay. The surgery would have only been to avoid kids.

**G:** Why didn't you tell Albert?

**R:** I don't know. I didn't know myself what to do. I thought, "Well, whatever God has in store for me."

**G:** So you were close to getting the hysterectomy and decided against it, all by yourself?

**R:** Mhm. I had three more children. I had a miracle doctor though, Dr. Baumgartner. He was such a wonderful doctor.

**G:** Whenever you got pregnant, were you worried? Were you scared?

**R:** No, I wasn't scared. I just thought the doctor should do what he can. I trusted the doctors. They were pretty good in those years. A lot of doctors were around and nice help. Hospitals were packed and staffed. That's what's lacking so bad now. I hate to know anybody who gets sick and is in the hospital.

**G:** It is terrible. Let's jump back a little bit, if that's okay. Why did you want to marry Albert?

**R:** It seemed like he was the only one that cared for me. He didn't care if I was sick or not. I mean, he just took care of me. I couldn't believe that he wanted me. He didn't want to give up. He knew I was all that sick, and he said, "Well, whatever happens."

It seemed to me like I could have different boyfriends and I just couldn't live with them. I didn't like them enough to live with them, and it's amazing how that works on a person. There was one guy and Valeria said, "Oh, Rose. You should go with him." I said, "I don't have feelings for him. I don't like him – not that I don't like him. He's a nice, friendly guy and he means well, but I have no feelings for him." He had a farm, and he could live on his own farm. Some people really went for the money back then. Well, I couldn't go for that. Then all at once, Albert came back again. He always came back. (She laughs.) I had a few other ones too, ei, ei, ei... They were just like a lady friend or something to me.

**G:** What was your favorite thing about him? Why was he different from the rest?

**R:** He was really nice and gentle all the time. He

wasn't drinking or smarting off. I just seemed so special to him. His mom and dad were agreeing with him too. They liked me, and mom and dad didn't say anything neither about him. A lot of times the parents stepped in, but his folks were really good to me all those whiles I was sick and had the babies. It was unbelievable how nice his parents and his brothers were to me. They always visited me when I was sick. Everybody liked me in his family even though I was sick as a dog. That's probably why they put up with me. They didn't think that I would... but it seemed like I got my work done, and my family helped me along. They didn't have to do much work for me.

**G:** Did your parents like Albert?

**R:** Yeah, they didn't complain about him at all. He always had a job. He wasn't lazy or lying around like some guys that just don't work. He always had a job. He started working with the pools, and that was a miracle too. Now my family has the pool business. It just showed how he could work in his family. He had all the poor boys working for him one year. Unbelievable.

*Rose and Albert. Albert was on leave.*



**G:** What year did you two get married?

**R:** In 1955 I think it was.

**G:** What makes a good marriage in your opinion?

**R:** Just try to put up with each other. (She laughs.)

**G:** Easy enough. Did you both move to Strasburg right away?

**R:** No, we lived on his parent's property. Albert thought he was going to farm. He would have liked to be on his dad's farm, but his family wouldn't let him. They got to the point where they rented the land out to other farmers. We couldn't afford to rent the land, so we had to get out of the farm. We looked for a job, and pool maintenance is what he landed up with after a while.

**G:** Didn't you guys go to California for a time?

**R:** Well, we were looking for jobs. We were in Minneapolis too, but Victor and those guys just didn't have one. It seemed like no one needed any help. We just couldn't get a job no place. We were there for the weekend, and then we went to California. Oh, was that something. That was a dumb trip. It was horrible.

**G:** Why did you guys decide to leave California?

**R:** I said to Albert, "What's the difference where we starve?" (She laughs.) "If you can't find a job," I said, "then we should go back." I knew a lot of farmers, when mom and dad farmed. They thought that they all left, and they did all leave. They went on. A different life developed for different times. Now, I can't thank God enough that we made it back because what would have happened to my kids down there? I wouldn't have had the family I have now. No way.

**G:** That's crazy you guys didn't find any work in California.

**R:** Albert just could not, and we drove all over. It was unbelievable. Marty and Jake were the ones that said we should come down because that's where they found jobs. But I don't know. We went all through the state. We couldn't find a job. He worked in a place where they were making mattresses, and that factory closed. On and on, he worked at another place and that closed up or laid him off. Then we were sitting again. So we got a

a little money together and went back. The people that we rented from gave us the money back from the rent and everything.

**G:** That's so nice of them.

**R:** Yes! We were really treated so good down there. We went out there in October and then in March we came back. Then they started looking for jobs for the swimming pools. Strasburg built a swimming pool that year. It was in 1960. Mhm.

**G:** Did he keep working for the pool business after helping build the Strasburg pool?

**R:** Mhm, 'til he got sick, 'til he got cancer. All those years... I went along a lot of times when he traveled for work fixing pools. We made ends meet. We got the house paid up, and always the vehicle paid up and... yep, 'til he was going to retire, but he worked for quite a while. We had four boys and two girls. We were so happy.

**G:** When did he receive his diagnosis?

**R:** It was in February when he was diagnosed with cancer. He had a big tumor in his lung.

**G:** Do you remember what year?

**R:** Oh, he died in '86. That was in '86 when he was diagnosed.

**G:** Wow, he was diagnosed pretty late then.

**R:** (Nods deeply.) Yes, February, and in July he died. He said he can't breathe anymore, so I took him to Linton. They took a picture of his chest, you know. His lungs were not right. They then rushed him to Bismarck. Then there was nothing to do anymore.

**G:** Did he stay in Bismarck until July?

**R:** He went back and forth to the hospital. He stayed at home for a couple of days, and then he had to go back again. Oh my God, and then they put him on the oxygen later on. Mhm. Back and forth we went.

**G:** That must have been hard.

**R:** Yeah it was very... he was so sick. He suffered a lot, but they [the doctors] were so good. I took him to the hospital, and I stayed up there for weeks sometimes. One time I think we were up there for

almost a month. They let me sleep right there in the bed.

**G:** That is very nice.

**R:** Yeah, that was amazing. Nowadays, oh my God. People are treated so bad. It's unbelievable.

**G:** Did grandpa pass away at home?

**R:** Hm-mh, he passed away in the hospital. The priest talked to him when he was home and at the hospital. He was in a coma for three weeks though. They said to be careful what we say, to not make him feel hurt because he can hear even in his coma.

**G:** Were all the kids around when he passed?

**R:** No, it was just our two girls and myself. They warned me that he wouldn't make it very long, but you never know. The boys were working, and sometimes you sit there for weeks at a time it seems. Then I didn't call, but they were all there that weekend. He passed away on a Wednesday. He was 57.

**G:** That's very quick. Wow.

**R:** Yeah, that went fast. Mhm.

**G:** Five months.

**R:** He didn't, like a lot of them, live a year or so, take treatments and get better, and worse and better. He didn't have that chance. Well, he was so sick already at work. Again he worked, and he came home for Christmas. I don't know why he forced himself to work. The kids said that when he had to go downstairs, they had to help him already. He couldn't hardly move around, and he was at work yet, and he came home and never went back.

**G:** Was the company he worked for fair when he had to take his leave?

**R:** Yeah, mhm. He had a \$10,000 dollar life certificate with him that we kept. Yeah, I had it.

**G:** That must have been difficult being alone after that.

**R:** We were married for 31 years. I kept living in Strasburg at the house. I prayed a lot. It gets lighter, but you never forget it. You can't feel sorry for yourself neither. My dad had already passed, but I tried to fill up the time by taking care of my mom 'til she went too.

**G:** Do you think there's a key to a long life? What is your secret to a long life?

**R:** Just never give up, I mean, even though you feel sick, just fight it. I never thought I would have lived this long. They all told me I wouldn't.

### **Ending**

*Rose's heart stopped beating after 95 long years of not giving out on her, and 39 years of living alone after her husband's death. She now rests with him in their cemetery plot, their gravestone depicting carpenter tools (Albert) and prayer hands (Rose), their wedding date, and the names of their six children they raised together.*



# FAMILY TREE

